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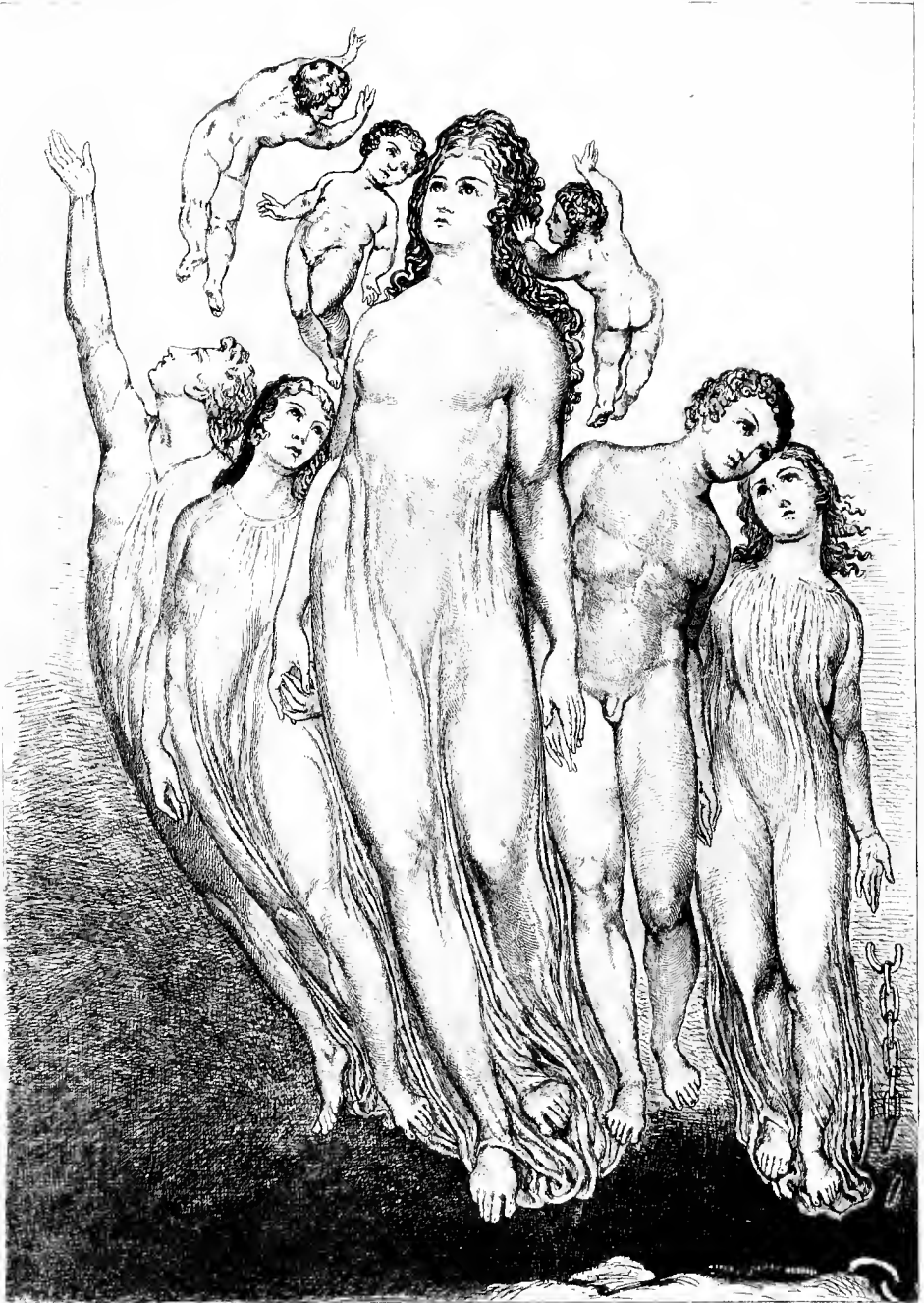
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A LOST MOTHER

In Most Loving Memory of

MY MOTHER

FRANCES CHARLOTTE BARLOW



Butler

"THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NEITHER SORROW NOR CRYING, NEITHER SHALL
THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN; FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY."

A LOST MOTHER

BY

GEORGE BARLOW

Author of "The Pageant of Life" and "From Dawn to Sunset"

"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART : FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD"

London

SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO.

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1892

*This time last year, mother, thou wast with me—
The flowers still bloomed, the world was full of light :
The sun still flamed at morn, o'er land and sea ;
The stars still ruled the empire of the night.*

*To-day thou art gone, and all is changed indeed !
For me the whole dim world in shadow lies.
Not from the sun, the stars, doth light proceed,
But from the love that fills a mother's eyes.*

*Yet, though the light die out on hill and plain,
Though darkness spread its veil across the deep,
Though I shall never meet on earth again
Thine eyes, closed in their everlasting sleep,—*

*Though thou art gone from thine accustomed place,
Though sorrow do its deadly best to kill,
God, who divides, can bring us face to face,
The Power that wrought our love is with us still.*

September, 1892.

A LOST MOTHER.

I.

I.

1.



FROM immemorial time thou hast been here

With each sweet new-born year :—

Must this year's hours

Keep lonely watch with me for bloomless flowers ?

2.

From immemorial time thou hast been mine,

Love's gift, love's tenderest sign :—

Now must I see

The unpitying darkness shroud love's form and thee ?

3.

O mother! mother! So the breezes cry,—

The listening waves reply ;

What, art thou dead !

Does no strong help stoop downward from on high ?

4.

O mother! mother! So the forests moan

And heavenly heights, star-sown :

Thou art dead ! thou art dead !

And I am left in all the world alone.

5.

From babyhood to childhood, and from this

To manhood, thy grave kiss

Shielded,—Dead ! Dead !

What hath become of thy revered grey head ?

6.

Thou hast closed the door,—thou wilt again appear
With the new green-robed year:
Thou art not dead,—
'Twas but a dream, one moment of wild fear.

7.

Thou hast closed the door,—thou wilt again return?
This madness we shall spurn.
Thou art not dead:—
Thou wilt walk with me through the flowers and fern?

8.

Thou art asleep,—thou wilt again awake,
Mother, for thy son's sake?
Thou art not dead,—
Dead! O my God,—and will my heart not break?

9.

Thou art just sleeping for a little while
And then thou'lt wake and smile !
Living, not dead,
Thou wilt arise from that cold white still bed.

10.

What, never more awake ? Thine eyes no more
Watch the new daylight pour
In at the window-pane,—
Thine ears hear no sea-music on the shore ?

11.

Never ? I'll not believe it ! 'Tis not so :
Thou canst not wholly go ;
Nay, thou wilt come again,
And with the same eyes watch the green buds grow.

12.

And yet, where art thou? Oh, the spring comes back :

It is not green, but black !

And summer brings no flowers

Now, to pour round her on the sunny track.

13.

Yea, all things change for me ; the morn will long

Be dim with sense of wrong,

The starlit hours

Most dumb, most dark, that once were light and song.

14.

Thou hast been with me these glad many years,

Mother,—Oh grant that I,

Since thou art dead, may die !

Love pleads for death : 'tis life alas ! who hears.

II.

15.



SURELY I needed thee the most of all,—

Thy heart on which to call.

And now thou art dead,—thou art dead,—

On me most weak this heaviest blow must fall.

16.

There could not be beneath the blue calm sky

One mother-needing spirit such as I,—

And yet thou art dead,

Thou turn'st not back for groan or prayer or cry.

17.

I needed thee,—and yet a million more

Are motherless as well:

Vast is pain's iron hell;

Millions have watched at death's relentless door.

18.

And now I join the army robed in grief
Whom from afar I've seen :
What sorrow's depth may mean
They tell me,—none can point me to relief.

III.

19.



ND must I live my life, and rise and sleep ?
Work,—since I cannot weep ?
Must daily toil begin,
A joyless strife renewed, with nought to win ?

20.

Has life a value, mother, now for me
Lonely, apart from thee ?
From dawn to set of sun
Never was work without thy counsel done !

21.

How shall I strive, alone,
To lure the coy Fame downward from her throne?
If Fame should stoop at last
Would not the soul's exultant power be past?

IV.



22.

O friends around can know,
Mother, dead mother, that I loved thee so!
I am not one to speak
Or ease my heart by passionate overflow.

23.

They are kind,—but have they heard
With me for many a spring the spring's first bird,
Seen gulf and creek
Flash with a thousand gems at summer's word?

24.

Have they, when exiled summer dies of pain,
 Watched autumn's glittering reign,
 And, labouring even as one,
Through sunless winters sighed not for the sun?

25.

Have flowers and ferns and shells in many lands
 Gathered by earnest hands
Taught loveliest lessons?—Now must all be o'er,
 Delight of groves and shore?

V.

26.



BEAUTIFUL blue sky, thou gleamest on,
 Though she, my light, is gone!
And ye too have no hearts to sympathize,
 Ye placid starlit skies!

27.

Great careless fragrant rose
Blooming and shining in the garden-close,
How canst thou do this thing?
Art thou still crowned, when crownless pain is king?

28.

How the world followeth still
Its weary selfish ceaseless restless will!
She has passed away: and what
Is that to world,—or star or lake or hill?

29.

Cold Nature cannot mourn. We tell our woes
To cowslip or to rose;
They heed us not:
No sorrow breaks the griefless deep's repose.

30.

Little it is to wave or star indeed ;
These fail us at our need :
But if on heights divine
Listening my mother's soul be touched of mine

31.

Most deeply sorrowing, will she not come down,
Casting aside her crown ?
Will she not yearn to help me where I wait,
Eyeing the close-shut gate ?

32.

If she be living, palaced in the sky,
How shall God keep her there ?
For she will swift-winged to my succour fly,
Seeing my great despair !

33.

Shall she not answer prayer
Who hath answered even a thought, a wordless fear?
Through night's soft darkness shall she not draw near?
Ah!—black void endless air!

VI.

34.



N far-off years, a child, I used to pray
That death the self-same day
Might fall upon us both, my mother and me;
God, hast thou answered,—see!

35.

Here am I in my power of manhood,—strong,
Alas!—I may live long:—
I may live years and years and years alone,
A suppliant at death's throne.

36.

I may live years and years and years and years,
And never win sweet tears!
Seeking through song to solace—but in vain—
My heart's imprisoned pain.

37.

Shall I live years and years, and never see,
Mother, the face of thee?
See death call shuddering nations forth to die,
Yet, doing so, pass me by?

38.

Shall I see day give place to starlit night,
Yet miss my one star's light?
Miss, when spring's cowslips load with scent the breeze,
One flower more sweet than these?

39.

Shall I rise up and see the gold-tressed sun
And a new day begun,
Yet know that through that day
Thou wilt be all the while so far away ?

40.

For heaven, if heaven there be,
Is far-off, after all, far-off from me !
It is not like the sea,
Nor like a lane festooned with greenery,

41.

It is not like the lands
Wherethrough full oft we wandered with joined hands ;
Heaven may be in some star,—
Our fair bright living earth is fairer far !

42.

Though Christ, it may be, rose,
Passing to lordlier life from death's repose,
Yet strange to mortal eyes
Must be heaven's footless wastes, its trackless skies.

43.

Ah! cruel far-off heaven where Christ and she
Together now may be :
Thou art to man as music faintly heard,
Or note of far-off bird.

44.

To walk with her along one London street
Would be so real and sweet !
Wan Sorrow, unconsolated,
Disdains heaven's sapphire floors and streets of gold.

45.

To pluck with her a blue-bell from the hill,
Or cowslip from the lane,
Would be a nobler gain
Than wealth of fields the jewelled blossoms fill !

46.

Wherever now she dwells
I still am on the earth, and past all speech
I long with her to tread the moonlit beach
Or the furze-yellowed fells.

VII.



47.

F I could see thee !—know
Just once for certain that thou waitest me,
The dreariest pang would go :
But this is just the gift which cannot be.

48.

Most hard it seems to bear,
Most hard,—that, if the dead be living yet,
Our foreheads may be met
Never by breathings from their mountain-air.

49.

O mother—just to know
That Death's forlorn black "*Never*" is a lie!
Then could I wait to die;
Will no Power speak the word I long for so?

50.

I gaze into the void
Of silent sea and starlit deep-blue air,
By the heart's madness buoyed:—
It is in vain; thou art not there.

VIII.

51.



DID not see thee waxing day by day

Older,—how could I see?

Thou wast the same to me

As flower or moon or sun or starry ray.

52.

Though thou wast growing grey,

I noticed not,—thou wast there every morn :

Fair credulous love hath only sweetest scorn

For death, and dreams no dream can pass away.

IX.

53.



HAT thou shouldst be my mother hour by hour,

Changeless, of sovereign power,

That all of thine should last

Though aging worlds drew deathward, darkening fast,

54.

This seemed past question : yea, that when the morn
O'er golden hills was borne,—
That when at drowsy noon
The glad earth slept, with eyelids touched by June,—

55.

That when from budding copse or white-flowered tree
Rang forth the throstle's glee,—
That when the blue waves bore
Tribute of rainbow shells to rock or shore,—

56.

That when the boats black-hulled and russet-sailed
Gleamed, till the light wind failed,—
That when the bright star-rebels, one by one
Glittering, deposed the sun,—

57.

That then thou shouldst be with me seemed so right

That never, save at night

Sometimes, when flashes of the future came

Across me like a flame,

58.

Could I conceive that one day all these things

Would go on as before,

But *thou* wouldst never mark the throstle's wings

Nor watch the white-edged shore.

II.

I.



1.

HEREIN the agony lies,
The dark strange torment past man's power to bear,—
That thou art wrapped in dim funereal air
Unpierced of mortal eyes ;

2.

That never—never again—this much is sure—
Can I behold thy face
Until I pass the gateway of the place
Sunless, unknown, obscure.

3.

E'en yesterday—it seems—to find thy room

I had but to cross one street :

To-day . . . before we meet

I too must pass the gateway of the tomb.

II.



4.

SAW thy face in death ;

Calm, lovely, almost girlish, so it seemed—

Lying like one that dreamed

A dream so sweet the dreamer held her breath.

5.

Yet, mother, unto me

Thy lined sweet aged face was sweeter far :

Whatever angels are,

My need is not of angels, but of *thee*.

III.

6.



E held the gates in force,—but in the night

When on our baleful town

The murderous fog sank down,

When moon nor star gave sweet and helpful light,

7.

Then, through one postern-gate

The silent Shadow crept ;

It slew her while she slept ;

We seized our weapons . . . Ah, too late ! too late !

IV.

8.



OR years beyond man's dream

The viewless host of death has held its own :

With trumpet-sound, or with no bugle blown,

No warning lance-point's gleam,

9.

That dim veiled host has crept from town to town
Changing man's mirth to sighs—
Snatching from monarch's brow the lordliest crown,
Closing the fairest eyes.

10.

And yet to those who weep
The shock seems ever new and ever strange :
Though all the world might change,
The form they loved they thought their love could keep.

III.

I.



1.

COULD we have known that death was near
How many things our lips would then have said,
Winning sweet answer from the lips now dead,
Things sweet to say and hear!

2.

What loving farewell then upon the verge
Of this the change supreme,
Within full sight, full hearing, of the surge
Of that strange sea that flashed with distant gleam!

3.

What thoughts to tarry with us night and day
Then through the coming years,
Thoughts that might wipe away
Some well-nigh hopeless tears!

4.

Ah! so we dream. In this the answer lies
Perhaps to our despair—
That love is changeless, whether past the skies
Or breathing here our earthly air:

5.

That where most perfect love
Has been, no farewell formal and forlorn
Could aid, or serve to move
From the pierced brow one point of thorn.

6.

The last "Good-night"—not known to be the last—

 This, it may be, far more availed

Than any summing up of all the past

 Or kiss, while life's strength slowly failed.

II.

7.



AND yet while human longing fills the heart;

 While mortal still we be,

'Tis agony to see the loved depart

 Without a word, rapt from us suddenly.

8.

'Tis agony to know that in the night

 While we were sleeping, dreading not the morn,

The soul took flight,

 Afar through mists and solemn darkness borne.

9.

So that, as now we stand
Upon the margin of the sailless sea,
No look comes back, no wave of hand,
Nor will—mother—for all eternity.

III.



10.

THE gate of death may lead
Not nearer to, but even away from, thee!
Thy memory lives in me;
But when I die, oblivion will succeed.

11.

That grim thought pains me. Though to-day I grieve,
Yet in that very grief
Lies somewhat of relief:
Through me thy heart throbs on, thine eyes perceive.

12.

But when I pass away
Who then will ever know, or care to know,
How brightly upon us flamed the golden day
In Cornwall, in sweet summers long ago!

13.

Who will remember then, as I recall,
Those emerald-clear Atlantic waves
That stormed the grey cliff's moveless wall?
What sound shall reach our graves?

14.

Blue skies, green fields, and fair unnumbered flowers
That we have seen, these live within my thought:
But when I die, why then there will be nought
Living of all that once was ours.

15.

So, after all, the gateway of the tomb
May only lead to second death for thee,
For then will fade our flowers' last lingering bloom :
They all will die with me.

IV.

16.



DEATH that sparest not the tiniest flower,
The smallest sea-weed in the whole wide sea,
Wilt thou spare me,—
Wilt thou not give me my victorious hour ?

17.

Thou takest to thyself all summer bloom ;
Along the violet-scented vales thy hand
Sweeps, and behold the land
Is as a tomb !

18.

No timid prayers, no blossom-pleas, delay
Thine hosts upon their way :
Thou steal'st the rose,—
Then at thy touch September's glory goes.

19.

Dead golden Junes are glad within thy halls,
And thy voice calls
In the end all weary singers unto thee :
Forget not me,

20.

Thou showedst Keats within thy starlit bowers
Fairer than earthly flowers,
And her my mother thou didst gently take,—
Me thou wilt not forsake?

21.

When thou dost light within thy sombre sky
Lamps lovelier far than ours that wane and die,
For me reserve thou one ;
Then lead thou back the mother to the son.

V.

22.



HY struggle over creeds and bandy blows
With Science? knowledge grows :
Let her develop in her own domain,
And therein nobly reign.

23.

Christ's miracles mean this ;
Believe or disbelieve the literal fact,
The saving word or act—
The thought remains to grasp or miss.

24.

The thought is this—that God
Descends to man,—that frail-souled man is crowned,
Shadowed and compassed round,
By Love that takes the lowliest road.

25.

The thought is this—that Love
Forsook the heavenly bowers
Its strength to prove,
And stooped to gather pale earth's humblest flowers :

26.

That even the deepest grave
Hides not from God, whether that tomb may be
Where mountain pine-boughs wave
Or in the lampless sea ;

27.

Or in some prison dim
Where never sweet delivering sunlight goes
Nor starlight, nor the breath of any rose—
These graves are open unto him.

28.

And this the thought conveys—
That all man's sorrows, diverse as they are,
Reach God; that God is in no distant star,
That God's foot treads our dusty ways;

29.

That—this it brings to me,
This news—that when my mother died
God stood as surely at her side
Watching, as at the cross on Calvary.

VI.



30.

H E who redeems from death
Is with the unerring mighty death-force one;
There are not two vast Powers beneath the sun;
One God bestows, the same God stays, the breath.

31.

One God, and only One,
In flower-filled Galilee
By the clear inland sea
Spake through blue waves, bright blossoms, to his Son;

32.

Then, at the bitter end,
Built up with iron hands the cross that slew,
Aye held the spear that smote his Son's side through;—
Death, life, are one same Friend.

33.

So, mother, unto thee and me
It may be God first spake
At crimson sweet daybreak,
Even as the Giver of long glad days to be :

34.

Then 'neath the noontide sun
Spake still,—spake as the One
Who brought unto our door
Of rich pure blessings so divine a store :

35.

Then lastly, it may be,
When came the sunset, then the dim night's close
(Oh night—that night!), God as sweet Death arose,
Thy Steersman still—to shores we may not see.

VII.



36.

THOUGH swathed in mists and storm
That Steersman's shape, that Steersman's face, may be,
Yet may we sometimes see
Erect, unmoved, the Watcher's form.

37.

Though starlight fails us, though the wild ship goes
Through lampless wastes where never sun arose,
Yet, mother, "Hitherto"—so thou didst say—
"The Lord hath helped us on our way."

38.

I take the inspiring word,
On thy lips lately heard :
"Through starless nights, through days of strife and storm,
May he who guided two, guide still one form!"

VIII.

39.



YE, even in disease
When fail the heart and brain,
When fails still more the soul of him who sees,
Yet cannot lull, the maddening pain—

40.

Then, even then, the Lord
Within the strange unknown disease may lurk,
Watching his atom-armies at their work,
Giving each germ its keen small sword:—

41.

That so this bodily frame
Assaulted, stormed, or undermined at last,
May fade by natural laws into the past,
Given back to earth, or given to flame;

42.

That then, the fleshly scaffolding removed,
The soul's fair palace, finished quite, may gleam,
Lovelier than palace of the loveliest dream,
Lovelier than all we loved.

43.

Within the pain, behind the laws of pain,
Working through pain's own laws
With never check nor pause,
May be the Power who moulded heart and brain :

44.

Who, comprehending well
His handiwork, can hold his own
And lead direct the sufferer to his throne
Even through the vale of hell.

IX.



45.

WHEN face to face I stood
With the dim form by death already veiled,
When heart and spirit quailed
Already at life's o'ershadowing solitude,—

46.

Then—though in days gone by
It needed not a cry
To bring sweet answer from the lips divine
That were alive, and mine—

47.

Then—though the slightest plea
Brought answer back to me
Once—then my soul's most hopeless moan
Wrung forth no answer from thy lips of stone.

X.

48.



HIS saddens me—that never more
On whatsoever golden shore

We twain may meet, will mother and son

Be made through weakness even more fully one.

49.

It breaks my heart to think,

Mother, my one best friend,

That I no more may lend

My aid to thee on the dark river's brink.

50.

So sweet it is—the weakness of old age!

So sweet thy gentle face,—

And in it one might trace

The lessons of long life, pure page by page.

51.

Thou needest me no more !
Thou needest not my arm on which to lean—
Oh God, no angel-form, no heavenly scene,
No palace flashing gems from roof to floor,

52.

Only my mother's figure, slightly bent,
Herself, not able to walk far,
This I desire!—no stately angel sent
From deathless sun or star.

XI.



53.

EA, now the sudden change!

Now am I, as it were, once more a child :

Thou from the heights to me most strange
Canst stoop to aid me, weary and sin-defiled.

54.

Thou art renewed, reborn ;
Now thou hast passed the dark sad hour
Thou hast the sunlit brow, the deathless power :
'Tis I who am weak,—and utterly forlorn.

XII.

55.



AND if in one swift flash I understand,
Mother, the heart of thee,
Thou too mayest know more fully me
Than when we walked here, hand in hand.

56.

Thou now dost see more fully—is it so?—
That I was seeking God, through darkling ways ;
That I was compassed round by fiend and foe
And fought 'mid gloom and haze.

57.

Is death's hand, after all, the only hand
 That leads two spirits towards one haven at last?
 Is death even as the watcher at the mast
 Whose voice rings through the silence, crying "Land!"

XIII.

58.



HEY "sealed" the sepulchre and "made it sure,"
 "Setting a watch"—but yet . . .
 Can God's light traverse even the ways obscure
 Where death's and horror's ice-cold hands have met?

59.

Us the foul horror chills:
 O God of sunlight, canst thou pierce the gloom?
 The tomb of Jesus was an empty tomb;
 My mother's? . . . Empty also, if God wills.

XIV.

60.



OST sweet, most loving, full of wild romance,

A hundred hearts may be :

Mother, who loved like thee?

Love we forsake, lured on by passion's glance.

61.

Through moonlit nights we stroll

With passion hand in hand

And deem we have found the soul ;

But, when death comes, we understand.

62.

We understand that she who bare

The child, is tenderest ever through the years :

We understand,—with tears

Sometimes—even with despair.

XV.



63.

IN the cold early morn
The ringing at the bell,—the message sent !
Through the dark streets I went,
Encountering full death's glance of scorn.

64.

O silent streets, O night
That ended as the light
So dim, so cheerless, so heart-broken, came,
Were ye the very same,

65.

The same streets, and the night
Through which a few short hours before
I passed, while all around seemed bright ?
Even so the ship is doomed when nearest shore.

XVI.

66.



OD to this agony brought me—did he plan
In far-off days the mode to bear me through?
Is not one point unknown to him and new,
Though strange to suffering man?

67.

Can he who sees the whole
Bear through the darkness threatening from afar,
Even as a small but unextinguished star,
The vessel of my soul?

XVII.

68.



ND if the sorrow of one
Be thus discounted, thus foreseen and known,
Can God in every case not hold his own
And cope with every grief beneath the sun?

69.

Not only with *our* grief,
But with the sorrow in each most distant star,—
If in those golden orbs there are
Souls clamorous for relief?

70.

Is all foreseen—this universe of ours,
Is it held safe within the Father's hand?
Is all foreknown and planned,—
Our human deaths, and even the deaths of flowers?

71.

Is there no pang too much?
No grief that cannot in the far-off end
By Love's transmuting touch
Be changed to joy, a foe become a friend?

72.

Shall I be told, when pain is past,
By thine own lips, O mother, it may be,
Why thou wast taken thus from me?
Will death the conqueror be dethroned at last?

XVIII.



73.

HIS surely is good to know,
That of all griefs there surely comes an end,—
For all griefs always towards oblivion tend
In their wild ebb and flow.

74.

Our own death draweth near;
This too must follow soon,—
Whether we pass beneath a summer moon
Or when the storm-struck surges wail with fear:

75.

Whether one buoyant spring revive the ways,
Tuning along the meads its lyre
Once more,—or whether death delays
And answereth not our deep desire.

76.

Then grief must cease,—even thus—
The dead will come again
And smile again on us,
Or we shall quite forget the haunting pain.

77.

One of two things must be
(For that the dead will not draw near
If they be living yet, I have no fear)—
Either at death that haunting pain will flee

78.

Banished by blissful sight
Of those we loved once more restored,
Or over and round about us will be poured
The vast oblivion of the unending night.

XIX.

79.



OW huge is man's long-historied grief!
Aye, even in days ere history was begun
Death stabbed some mother, and her son
Mourning as I mourn, found as small relief.

80

In some vague land forgotten of light,
Buried beneath the weight of endless years,
The same cry pierced the night—
“*Mother!*” Who heard? Who hears?

XX.



81.

O be made wholly one
With all the world in fellowship of grief
May count for something. Human joy is brief,
And sorrow stalks between us and the sun.

82.

I told my story of pain to one I met;
He gentler seemed, to grief more reconciled.
He said: "A grey-haired mother you regret;
I sorrow for a child."

XXI.



83.

O many have gone before!
Surely thou art not lonely, mother, there.
Strong souls are ready, faces sweet and fair,
To welcome thee upon the further shore.

84.

'Tis I who am left alone !
Thou feel'st the grasp of many a loving hand :
Thy brothers by thee stand ;
My father claims thee, long-lost, for his own.

85.

But oh ! forget not me
Left on this dreary earth,—prepare a place
Where I again may see thy face,
Mother, and dwell with thee.

XXII.

86.



THE years between seem nought :
Across the years towards boyhood now I go ;
Again the blue waves flow
Of seas that shine in thought.

87.

My life's steps I retrace :
For four and forty years thou hast been with me—
It seems, now God has taken thee,
But one brief moment's space.

88.

Thy day of death (O day of mist and tears!)
Looms from behind interminable years :
The day we gathered those white starlike flowers
Seems distant only a few short hours!

XXIII.

89.



If thou couldst wake as if from trance
Saying, "I have slept—I feel much stronger now;"
If I could meet again thy glance
And see morn's sunlight kiss thy brow :

90.

If thou couldst say, "I journeyed to the tomb

But now again God gives me back to thee,

Back to the flowers (how sweet their bloom !)

Back to our sky and sea :"

91.

Why, then I might perhaps forget,

If thou wert thus restored,

These hours of agony—and own my debt

Then to the pitying Lord.

XXIV.

92.



H! why should only Lazarus return,

Quitting the clay-cold grave, the narrow bed ?

So many souls lament, and wild hearts burn—

God, give us back our dead !

93.

Why choose—it seems unjustly—only one?

Why blunt but once Death's eddying sword?

Why hear a sister's prayers, yet not a son—

What of my mother, Lord? --

XXV.

94.



AND yet if all the clamorous host

Of mourning hearts were heard,

If at each prayer returned a dead sweet ghost,

If all man sought for God conferred,

95.

How fruitless then would this life be—

What crowds would block death's door

In at that gateway storming like the sea,

Insurgent evermore!

XXVI.



96.

WHEN the soul longs to weep
Then to feel turned to stone,
This is indeed an agony most deep—
Deadlier than pain of tears or passionate moan.

97.

Some sob themselves to sleep—
Sleep soothes the pent-up agony within,
Comfort and aid they win :
Weep thou, O God, for those who cannot weep !

XXVII.

98.



THROUGH this last strange sad year
Beside the graveyard gate
I seem to have stood, there watching bier on bier,
Myself most desolate.

99.


I have seen a beauty radiant as the morn,
A young girl's bloom,
Into that starless blackness borne
We, shuddering, call the tomb :

100.

I have seen a mother's love depart—
Having struck once, O Lord,
Not in its sheath, but in my heart,
Thou hast sheathed thy dripping sword !

XXVIII.

101.

“  HE singer feels not, in that thus he sings,”
You say?—Nay if he sang not, pain would kill.
He takes the help God brings
Who bids him even in hell's depths sing on still.

102.

“The singer feels not”—Nay, so much he feels
That, if he sang not, every day
In blank despair would creep away
And self-destruction lurk at darkness’ heels.

XXIX.

103.



HEN all is done that can be done
And all that can be said is said,
Time leaves alone the mother with the son—
The son alive, the mother dead.

104.

That is the torture. Through the day and night
The vision still is there;
The face so calm, but oh! so white—
The silent lips, the silver hair.

105.

The night before she kissed me, and the kiss
Just like another came and passed :
O God how different, had we known that this—
This—was the very last !

XXX.

106.



HE sorrow is spread across a wider space
When brothers, sisters, mourn one common loss.
But she and I stood face to face :
I bear alone my cross.

107.

A widow she, and I an only son—
That made communion sweet.
Our lives were closely linked, as few or none
Have had the gladness—and the grief—to meet.

108.

No separation marred our joy ;
The mother had become the perfect friend :
The man drew even nearer than the boy,
Aye, ever nearer, till the very end.

XXXI.

109.



HER mind was ripening till the very last,
Alive to all the news that each day brings ;
Before her earth's wild pageant passed,—
Its crowned Republics and its throneless kings.

110.

When battle's trumpet rang out shrill
Her eyes with passionate interest watched the fray,
And every stormy question of the day
Drew close attention still.

111.

Mingled with holier lore
She loved the legends of old Greece and Rome,
And crossed in thought the dim sea's foam,
Landing on many a far-off shore.

112.

The conversation ready and bright
So keenly I miss—the well-stored brain;
The mind's unintermittent light,
Quenchless by age or pain;

113.

The thought wherein confusion never crept,
Not weakness even—to the last hour clear;
The thought that from the first hour kept
Pace with my own thought here;

114.

This, not the loving heart alone,
I miss, and shall till life is o'er:
The soul that made one music with my own,—
Music that sounds no more.

XXXII.

115.



WHAT are all crowns of fame—
If any wreath, though my desert be small,
Should in the end to love and labour fall—
What are they worth,—what is a poet's name?

116.

For years I toiled to win
The laurel crown—it seemed the one thing worth
Eternal effort on the ephemeral earth:
Such effort seems to-day almost a sin.

117.

This was the one thing worth
Far more than all the highest success on earth—
To lay my tired pen down,
To cease from dreaming of the bay-leaf crown,

118.

To seek my mother's room
And there, though on the city darkness lay,
To meet the glad smile lovelier than the day,
Sunlike in London's deepest gloom.

XXXIII.

119.



ND yet I think that she would say to me,
"Cease not from effort—rather, struggle on!
Thou shalt not work alone:
Thy father and I will toil along with thee.

120

“Win thou the flower of fame;
Its odour shall be sweet
Even here,—yea, labour nobly till we meet:
Thou labourest for *our* name.”

XXXIV.

121.



HE golden crocus blows again,
But oh so different seems its brightness now!
I see it through a mist of pain:
The leaves seem altered on each budding bough.

122

Yea, all things take their colour from our thought:
The radiant waves
Will flash their countless gems for nought
On eyes that dream of graves.

123

So must it ever be.

I saw the flowers, the summer skies,

The splendour of the sea,

Not through my own, but through my mother's eyes.

XXXV.



124.

HOW little after all

Can it be to most that one more mother goes

From life to death's repose.

Can autumn sorrow for one red leaf's fall?

125.

Friends think they sympathize,

But yet how little can they understand!

There are so many mothers in the land:

How little one death signifies!

XXXVI.

126.



ND yet the sorrow of one appeals to all.

A song of deepest pain

In men's hearts may remain

When loveliest strains of pleasure's music pall.

127.

No song of flower or sea,

No song of morning on the sun-kissed hills,

No song that takes its cadence from the rills,

Hath in it grief's forlorn eternity.

128.

No Venus hath the power,

Though white and sweet and fair of limb she be

And full of glory of her mother-sea

And her soft mouth in flower,

129.

Yet hath she not the power to lure mankind
For all her deathless charms .
As grief can lure,—and as grief's song can bind,
Not with white hands but with gaunt iron arms.

XXXVII.



130.

AD we but closelier watched that day,
Had we but guessed that then the attack was planned,
Could we, a small but fully awakened band,
Have held the hosts of death at bay?

131.

Could we have kept death at the door
And given, if but for one sweet summer more,
Life and the joy of life to one
Gladdened so simply by fresh air and sun?

132.

I think we might have,—who can say?
But does not that most piteous “*might*”
In its mute force convey
A sense of horror deeper than the night?

133.

Yea deadlier, deeper, than the tomb
That shrouds my mother’s form from mortal eyes
Is the persistent gloom
That on her son’s soul lies;

134.

On his,—and on another watcher’s soul.
Two feel that, had their task been fully done,
Two broken hearts might even to-day be whole:
God help the watcher,—and the son!

XXXVIII.

135.



AND yet I seem to hear the dead sweet voice
Saying, "Blame not overmuch yourselves, my son :
God watched—no evil is done ;
Be thou not sad,—rejoice !

136.

" Even if the door of life was left ajar
Not through that door came death alone,
Nay, Love came with him,—Love who can atone
For all mistakes and sins in every star."

XXXIX.

137.



OMEWHAT no doubt at every death is felt
Of self-reproach—the watchers deem they slept
Or watched not keenly, when the blow was dealt,
When from its scabbard death's sword leapt.

138.

God help us—though we love, we are but frail :

When we would watch, we sleep.

May God the unsleeping Watcher keep

O'er all the loving watch that cannot fail !

XL.

139.



F now my father claims thee, is it well ?

If well for him, is it then ill for me ?

— Nay, surely golden flower and purple sea

And emerald hill-side have their tale to tell ?

140.

If now in heaven more dazzling flowers

Await her gaze, yet many a lovely sight

On this old earth was ours :

Fair sunlit morns, and many a moonlit night.

141.

How short a while ago to her I brought
Though she could tread the beach no more
News of the huge waves battling with the shore;
How quickly did she grasp the scene in thought!

142.

Not far-off will she roam,
While in her ear earth's sweet old music rings :
No angel's swiftest wings
Can bear her far away from this her home.

XLI.



143.

THROUGH work now lies the road,
Through work and daily duties, back to thee :—
As with clear gentle voice thou biddest me
Stoop and lift up my load ;

144.

The burden of daily labour to be done,
The burden of lonely thought—
Somewhat is waiting, ever, to be wrought
By patient toil, some summit to be won.

145.

Not through the graveyard, through the gate of life
Lies the road back to thee :
Through earnest labour, noble strife,
Working out ends my tired eyes cannot see.

XLII.



146.

E dream of angel-forms ;
Heaven is to us some wondrous land afar,
Lighted by rays of many a distant star,
Remote, untroubled by our dark-winged storms.

147.

Aye, so we dream—the truth we little heed.

The angel-voice spake clear ;

The heaven we sought was here ;

We see it now, too late,—too late indeed !

XLIII.

148.



HE storms, the troubles, brought the angelic aid :

Our land of rain and sun

Must sweeter be than one

All shadow, or devoid of any shade.

149.

The daily help, mother, the daily smile,

These were thine angel-tributes unto me ;

Time then was lovelier than eternity—

Alas ! but for awhile.

XLIV.

150.



ET cannot he whose power first wrought the dream
Prolong it—aye for ever, if he wills?

He who upon earth's emerald hills
Set sunlight, on the sea its sapphire gleam;

151.

He who bright day by day, glad hour by hour,
Hath helped us, filling every spring the land
With laughter of a thousand fields in flower
That flashed with countless gold beneath his hand;

152.

Can he not, though our hearts despond,
Elsewhere with nobler tints adorn the year?
The love that drew so fair a picture here
Has failed not ever. Can it fail beyond?

XLV.



. 153.

E say : " The dead know not ;
If they were with us, they could help to-day,
Share this dark grief, or bear this pain away—
If they could know, less sunless were our lot !

154.

"Again, if they could share our thought
Some thoughts of ours might bring delight,
Some rays from earthly stars might pierce their night;
We should not either weep or smile for nought.

155.

" Gladness (if such remain
For us) would be more glad
And sadness shared would be some shades less sad;
Less painful would be pain."

156.

Ah, they may not be far !
Our gladness may be theirs to-day ;
Our sorrows they may bear away :
They gaze not down from some cold callous star.

157.

They, though their life be lovelier far than ours,
Subject to higher laws,
May daily and nightly pause
To lay beside us fair memorial flowers.

158.

The wreaths we weeping brought,
The white pure sad funereal bloom
We left beside them in the tomb,
May be restored—in ways beyond our thought.

159.

Our life more fully, it may be, they can share
Than we their life to-day;
We gaze through skies of sullen grey,
They gaze through cloudless air.

160.

Far more of us they know
Than we of them at this strange hour:
Death may bestow on love undreamed-of power,
Bursting the senses' prison-gates at a blow.

XLVI.



161.

E were so well content,
So all-sufficient each to each,
So glad beyond all speech:
How could we dream the clear skies would be rent?

162.

How could we dream that from bright summer skies
This thunder-bolt would fall?
We never watched at all
For death—we only watched each other's eyes.

163.

When the green meadows bask beneath the sun
In summer, is there one
Who, seeing a tiny cloud, would hold his breath
Dreaming of death?

XLVII.

164.



F we would value love aright,
Must love be taken away?
Can no man truly love the day
Save only for the contrast of the night?

165.

O mother, was it just ?
Did I not feel the blessing of thine hand
Upon my brow ? Can I not understand,
Save when that hand is turning into dust ?

XLVIII.

166.



F so the lesson must be learned,
If love be taken from the earth
That we may know love's utmost worth,
Will there be scope to use the knowledge earned ?

167.

Will there be given me power to show,
Mother, that while thou wast with me
I failed to grasp the God in thee,
Knowing not what now I know ?

XLIX.

168.



HIS is a helpful thought—
That something wondrous waits
Behind the cloud-girt mystic gates
Of death,—a something each day nearer brought.

169.

“Look forward,” thou didst say,
“To meeting those we love.” Ah! through the strife,
The toil, the cares, of every day,
Mother, the great hope shines, and hallows life.

L.

170.



TILL, as each year the lilies blow
And gardens grow
Divine with fragrance, as each year the sea
In centuries yet to be

171.

With royal smile puts on anew
Its radiant robes of sunlit blue,
Through all the glory of Nature men will cry,
“Why must our loved ones die?”

LI.



172.

AND will the wild cry then
As now ring through the unanswering air?
Will no God mingle with the sons of men?
Will still the eternal silence mock man's prayer?

173.

Or do the night's wings bear
Answer, as only each one knows?
Can God who sends the sorrow, send repose?
Can God send hope, who sent despair?

LII.



174.

DEEMED I was alone,

But now from every side I hear the sound

Of weeping—mourners gather round:

My grief is linked with endless griefs unknown.

175.

My sorrow is part of these.

O God, amid the darkness round thy throne

We fall upon our knees:

Hear thou the prayer,—hear thou the wordless moan!

LIIL.



176.

SUCH fierce shocks pave the way

For our departure. All seems different now:

On sunlit mountain-height and leafy bough

Death sets his seal to-day.

177.

In even the slightest things we mark a change :

The value of all things alters here ;

Far more familiar grows the sphere

That seemed remote and strange.

178.

Life's roots are loosened by successive shocks :—

Even so the pine that braves the stormiest blast,

That lightning rends not from the rocks,

Falls to a puff of summer wind at last.

LIV.

179.



HE ice-cold horror of the tomb,

This haunts my heart by night, by day ;

It never passes quite away ;

'Mid sunlit thoughts the under-thought is gloom.

180.

Behind the flowers that light the garden bed,
Among the stars, within the blue waves' sheen,
I see the grim gaunt faces of the dead,
The countless graves at Kensal Green.

LV.



181.

NE most of all I see.
Forgive me, mother, if in my despair
Even though thou art not there
I seek the spot that saw the last of thee.

182.

I know not what thou mayest be now :
I only know
(And with the extreme deep bitterness of woe)
That eyes and hands and the belovèd brow,

183.

That all I held so dear,
At this point vanished. Could my thoughts forsake
At once the spot, even though an angel spake
Saying, "She is not here!"

LVI.

184.



IN times of deadliest pain
To hope from deep despair
The quick mind passes. Then it turns again,—
Questions its hope, interrogates its prayer.

185.

We are frail,—we fluctuate even in our woe;
We pass from phase to phase.
What was to-day, to-morrow is not so:
Swift change of feeling marks the inconstant days.

186.

So sometimes after hope's glad hand
Has raised her golden banner high
The sweet dream seems to die,
In agony I stand,

187.

Asking if hope with all her light
Be not the dream of one
Who, seeing the sinking sun,
Hearing at hand the footfall of the night,

188.

Creates himself an answer to his prayer,
Fleeing from his own despair,
And, feeling reason shake at doubt's wild gusts,
To save his reason without reason trusts.

LVII.



189.

HE old doubts confront the soul
To-day that man has had to face
In every age, in every place :

We, knowing a part, still yearn to know the whole.

190.

Sometimes a mother dies :—
For her the eternal rest is won
While still youth's bright glad sun
Gleams through her daughter's eyes.

191.

In heaven how shall it be ?
The daughter lives on year by year ;
The end seems not more near ;
Life's river finds not yet the shoreless sea.

192.

The varying days go by :

Some hours are glad with sunniest light,

Some dark with deepest night ;

Glad, dark, the countless hours are born and die.

193.

But still the mother waits—

The daughter's hair grows grey ;

No light yet flashes from the solemn gates

Through which the mother's form was borne away.

194.

Where shall they meet and how ?

The daughter now

Is altered, worn and old :

The hair the mother stroked was sunniest gold.

195.

How will the mother recognise
The changed dim eyes?
For time has stolen the light, the glow,
That filled them long ago!

* *

196.

How shall *I*, mother, being a son,
If thou art quite transformed to youth again,
Endorse the work by heavenly magic done,—
Save only with unutterable pain?

LVIII.



197.

F there be answer, then this thought
Must shape the answer—that the forms we see,
By whatsoever hand those forms be wrought,
Are wrought for time, not for eternity.

198.

They change, they are fugitive :
But the sweet love that from a mother's eyes
Shines, this shall surely live ;
Aye live for ever, though its framework dies.

199.

Time, change,—these count for nought :
The soul outlives the ever-shifting years,
By slow steps towards its victory brought
Though days of triumph, nights of bitter tears.

200.

The thought the forms expressed,
This lives for ever. When all stars wax old
Still will the mother see the hair of gold
Her hand in ages past caressed.

*

*

201.

So, mother, though love's earlier phase be o'er,
Though here thy task is done,
Thou art my mother evermore,
I, evermore, thy son.

LIX.

202.



F day by day I love the dead
With deeper passion, holier power,
May not they likewise feel from hour to hour
Not love's extinction—love's new birth instead?

203.

If I love them the more,
May not they too—if this high gift may be—
Love on, and even purer than before?
May not they also feel more love for me?

LX.

204.



SOMETHING it is to know that in the gloom

A love most sweet abides ;

That, when I seek the tomb,

I then shall grasp at once a hand that guides :

205.

That strong and tender aid

Waits in advance. Then, though death's surges swell,

Where thou art, mother, surely it will be well

For me to follow, unafraid.

LXI.

206.



STRAIGHT from the loves and flowers of sweet midday

My soul has passed. No afternoon

Has intervened, my thought to attune ;

With no slow steps the hours have stolen away.

207.

Straight from the sunlit morn

To this most sombre evening-hour

I have been led by some swift Power:—

Is it love that leads; or Fate's resistless scorn?

LXII.

208.



ACH century somewhat new

Is felt and thought of death—the problem strange

With newer knowledge seems to change:

It changes, as we change our point of view.

209.

And in this age when overmuch is known,

When Science summons from the deep

Dim past the centuries that sleep,

When Thought is crowned for Ruler, Thought alone,

210.

We gaze at Death with saddest eyes :

For we can number one by one

The stars, and analyse the sun—

Death's dateless secret who can yet surprise ?

211.

Moreover, all we know

Seems to remove the Lord so far away ;

The " Father " was so near in Jesus' day ;

Knowledge brings doubt, and doubt intenser woe.

LXIII.

212.



ACH life seemed unto them the seers of old

Of priceless value—but we say instead,

" How shall the Lord count all his dead ?

Can he relume life's embers once grown cold ?

213.

“On every star that lights heaven’s boundless sea
There may be life. Can God’s glance follow all?
Is one death more than one frail petal’s fall
To God, whose palace is eternity?”

LXIV.



214.

So one was doomed to bear
The pang of parting, maybe it was well,
Mother, that on thy son the burden fell;
Thou wouldst have had no strength to face despair.

215.

Thou in that other world mayest see
So many things that lighten pain:
But here I bear—I bear for thee—
The unalloyed deep grief that would have slain.

LXV.



216.

HE elder generation stood
Between us and the darts of death;
Safely we drew our infant breath,
But now the world becomes a solitude.

217.

The elders pass away:
The dear familiar faces one by one
Fade in the darkness—we still see the sun
And strive to hope, and sometimes strive to pray.

218.

We the survivors roughly brought
To the front stand forth, and deal fate blow for blow
Most sternly battling, but to-day with nought
Between us and the spear-points of the foe.

LXVI.

219.



HEREIN, and herein only, gladness lies,
That in that front rank now we stand,
Facing the hosts of death with tranquil eyes,
Weapon in hand.

220.

No more the faithful ones who took the darts
In their own bosoms screen and guard :
Death's arrows now will pierce our lonely hearts ;
Thank God !—the thought will render life less hard.

LXVII.

221.



HAVE crossed Song's threshold now so many a time
And alway, mother, thou hast been with me
To help my wayward rhyme ;
To-day I write not with, but only of, thee.

222.

I have written of joy, of passion's rose in bloom,
Of sea-waves, of the light—
But now of sadness and of grief I write,
Of darkness and the tomb.

LXVIII.

223.



ET in this song, the saddest by far
Of all my songs, wilt thou not help me still?
Gift me with nobler notes, a purer will—
Shine through the gloom, mine everlasting star!

224.

Wilt thou not aid mine heart to make
This last sad task divine
Even though it break?
Like all the rest, let this song too be thine!

LXIX.

225.



SOMETIMES, when first I wake,
My heart, forgetting all, forgets to ache :
Then comes remembrance with its poisoned fang
And its most sharp-edged pang.

226.

So may a prisoner in dim vault entombed,
At earliest daylight doomed,
When first he wakes for one wild moment see
Youth's meadows,—not the gallows-tree.

LXX.

227.



S, later on, he gazes down and meets
Eyes that betoken heedless hearts,
And through his soul an added horror darts
As laughter sounds from the tumultuous streets,—

228.

So with mute horror as I gaze
A host of mocking forms I seem to see :
They jeer and point at me,
And laughter rings up from the crowded ways.

LXXI.



229.

O much I miss

Amid the strife and turmoil of the fray
The mother's goodnight kiss,
That closed with blessing many a stormy day.

230.

However far away
For hours my wandering feet might roam
At night they found, and sweeter for delay,
The haven of home.

LXXII.

231.



AN'S steps were watched of old

By guardian spirits—the dead were near ;

Our cries of anguish they could hear :

In those days love was strong, and faith was bold.

232.

To-day . . . Thought holds its own,

And plants its sentries, stern in every spot.

To the dead, "Return ye not,"

They cry—and leave the mourner doubly alone.

LXXIII.



233.

O close our eyes to fact,

Is this found helpful? Is it well to say,

"The dead have never passed away :

They are still with us—they live, they love, they act " ?

234.

Is it well to let the heart
Dream on for ever—thus to find repose?
To say, “When flowers the summer rose
All sadness will depart:

235.

“The dead have never died—death is a dream.
In some green mead our dear ones wait;
We have but to pass the meadow-gate,
We have but to cross a stream.”

236.

Is it well to dream of them so much
That life and death become as one—
That they too traverse shade and sun,
Present to sight and touch?

237.

Is it well, as some would teach,
To imbue the soul with act and thought
Of those we mourn, till death becomes as nought—
Till we discern their eyes, and hear their speech?

238.

Is it wisely done and well?
Some day across a world in bloom
Flashes the whiteness of a tomb:
Reaction comes,—and hell.

LXXIV.



239.

“HE dead repose,” you say?
“The lines on brow and cheek are smoothed away”—
But then those lines meant *life*,
For this means strife.

240.

They meant the growing in love, the growing in grace,
They engraved life's history on the face :
Remove them—let them fade and die—
You steal as well the personality.

241.

You steal the self—you “smooth away” the thing
That long life, struggling life, alone can bring ;
You blur the sacred lessons of the years,
Learnt doubtless, some, through grief and tears.

242.

“Repose”—I grant you this, but life is dear,
Nought else we know of here :
To see the “lines” “smoothed out,” when fails the breath,
To me brings horror and accentuates death.

LXXV.



243.

HE streets so empty seem !
I wander through them, weary and sad :
Where once so many hearts were glad
I move, as in a dream.

244.

So it will be, till after many days
Or few (fewer pangs to bear !)
I pass from London's thinly-peopled ways
To crowded paths and populous streets elsewhere.

LXXVI.



245.

HON this Sabbath day
I dream of summer Sabbaths long ago,
Far, oh ! so far away—
Ere hope died out and doubt had time to grow.

246.

We sought the small white church, my mother and I—
The heath stretched green and wide :
We walked on side by side :
Above us burned the cloudless summer sky.

247.

All was so perfect then,
So joyous and complete ;—
God, was it well to make those days so sweet
If that pure joy can ne'er be ours again ?

LXXVII.



248.

O much there is to say !
Her grief with mine would be so wholly one.
If mother could but speak to son
For one half-hour, on but one day !

249.

One day in all the year—

The heart might then less wildly ache,

The dawn less sadly break,

With less of stormy pain or sunless fear.

250.

There must be since she died

Such worlds on worlds in either heart

Pent-up—so much to ask, so much to impart

On either side.

LXXVIII.

251.



F lordliest strength of song were mine

Still would it be worth while

To add sweet verse to verse and line to line—

Without the mother's eyes, the mother's smile?

252.

I lift the pen . . . I let it fall . . .

No labour now on earth

Seems of the slightest worth:

The shadow of death broods over all.

LXXIX.



253.

E struggle to provide

Even for the dead eternity on earth:

We inscribe their date of death, their date of birth;

A white fair cross we raise on green hill-side.

254.

“This shall all eyes perceive

Through all far future time,” we say:

“The stars by night, the sun by day,

Shall guard it—death-defying, this we achieve.”

255.

We lovingly arrange
That year by year beside the tomb
Each season's flowers shall bloom
In deathless interchange.

256.

And yet I sometimes think the dead may smile
With tear-filled eyes at all our care;
For 'tis but grim despair
Decked out in flowers, and silenced for awhile.

257.

If ampler faith were ours,
We might bestow less agony of thought
Even on the well-loved tombs. Then might be brought
From heaven to us a hope worth more than flowers.

LXXX.

258.



HO hath not felt despair

Hath never loved at all :

Yea, whoso sayeth that death doth not appal
Hath sought no grave, nor felt the darkness there.

259.

But whoso loveth well,
He sayeth with anguished heart,
“Thou glib and easy, smooth-tongued hope, depart !
Truth, truth alone, unbars the gates of hell.”

LXXXI.

260.



SOMETIMES the thought of death is sweet :

But then again the doubt will come,

“What if there be beyond the tomb
No friendly hands to meet ?

261.

“What if no loved ones wait—

No God’s triumphal throne,

But darkness, this alone ;

No temple of the Lord, no golden gate ? ”

* * *

262.

So might a wayfarer be told,

Told falsely, that beyond a stream

Bright palace-gates would straightway gleam,

And glittering windows lit by lamps of gold—

263.

So might he crossing full of hope

Be met by blasts of ice-cold air

And through black poisonous marshes grope,

Finding no palace there.

264.

So might—again—a stream be crossed
By eager hosts at night
And ere the morning light
That credulous army lost!

265.

For as across the stream they came
They found not friends they hoped to find
But all the banks disastrous lined
With murderous steel and flame.

LXXXII.



266.

HIS sorrow sometimes brings—
That round about our path small fair white flowers
All undiscerned in gladness' hours
We now perceive; or forth some new bud springs.

267.

And larger flowers the searching hand may glean—
Blossoms of love we saw not heretofore
Or, seeing so close at hand, glanced at no more ;
These now yield fragrance unforeseen.

* *

268.

So, wife, thy love for me reveals,
Now that I walk beneath the shadow of night,
Now that unlooked-for grief appeals,
Undreamed-of depth and height.

LXXXIII.



269,

N after-years,
Though it may seem that boyhood's memories fade
Shrouded in far-off shade,
They never fade—they thrill the soul to tears.

270.

The true sweet lessons taught
By a mother's voice, a mother's eyes,
These influence all our after-thought:—
The whole day's doom is settled at sunrise.

LXXXIV.



271.

HOUGH manhood's creed may change,—
Though faith's tired ship may wander far from home,
Tossed 'mid unkindred waves and alien foam,
Entering new ports and strange,—

272.

Still will the thought most pure and undefiled
Of early faith, of early prayer,
Weigh with the man, recalling everywhere
The creed the mother taught the child.

LXXXV.

273.



T times so deep the longing grows
Just to be near to thee—
As thou didst share thy life with me,
So now to blend my life with thy repose—

274.

So keen the wish becomes,
That even the thought that soon must dawn the hour
When Death's resistless power
Will bear me, pulseless, towards the land of tombs

275.

Becomes a thought to comfort's self allied :
The thought that, even shut out from sun and sea,
Again ere long together we shall be
And undergo corruption side by side.

LXXXVI.

276.



ENTER a graveyard—all around you see,
Though warm on turf and marble falls the sun,
Though round the green banks hums the bee,
Signs of Death's conquest won.

277.

Just here and there a few sad blossoms shine—
What art thou doing, O rose ?
No blossom here of royal line.
Without reluctance grows.

278.

"In loving memory." So the legend runs :
What memories here unite !
Memories of moonlit hours, of August suns,—
Memories of young years bathed in golden light.

279.

"In loving memory." Countless souls have wept;
The graveyard takes no note of groan or tear.
No lasting record can be kept
Of those who are resting here.

280.

"In loving memory." Round each sacred word,
Urged on by Time, the sluggish moss will creep:
Ah! those who loved, in love's sweet weakness erred
Deeming they graved so deep.

LXXXVII.



281.

ACH day I miss thee more,
In that the friends who thronged around
Pass—each on his own mission bound—
And all goes on as heretofore.

282.

Each day more clearly—this perhaps is well—
The difference measureless I see,
Mother, between the love that spake through thee
And love that speaks—with its own tale to tell.

LXXXVIII.



283.

SOMETIMES, when music speaks,
The dead return. For one sweet hour
The fields of youth around me flower :
Life's warm blood tinges ghostly lips and cheeks.

284.

But when the music fails, then oh !
Gone are the flowers, fled are the ghostly folk—
It is as if from summer dreams one woke
Upon a world of snow.

LXXXIX.



285.

HIS deepens pain—

The thought that those we love, for all the flowers
Of heaven and dreams of beatific hours,
Long to be here again :

286.

The thought that they, disconsolate indeed,
Are agonized at all our grief,
Longing—most vainly—to provide relief :—
This added sorrow makes the bruised heart bleed.

XC.



287.

ET they would know

What we know not as yet—the fact
That God hath power beyond the grave to act :
Their own life proves to them that this is so.

288.

We have not found the ford,
Nor can live tongue the dark stream's secret tell—
But they have found it, guided by the Lord:
They know that one day we shall cross as well.

XCI.



289.

O them the sense of time
We count by set of stars and birth of flowers
May be less shackled, more sublime :
Their summers and their morns are not as ours.

290.

To them the time that seems to us so long
May seem no longer than the pause
Between the close of spring's sweet song
And summer's fuller-throated rich applause.

XCII.



291.

T times I pray that Fate may place
Vast leagues of deathless air and griefless space
Between me and the spot
Where thou wast with me once, and now art not.

292.

Wide fields made fragrant with sweet summer's breath,
Valleys that know not death,
Hills with no clouds of sorrow overcast,
These interpose between me and the past!

293.

New cities I would see
And in them feel more near to thee
Perchance beneath a heaven of cloudless blue
Than in the sunless town that slew.

*

*

294.

So for one hour I dream—
Then fades the light from mountain, tower, and stream :
My home seems here, in London's gloom ;
I long to live and die beside thy tomb.

XCIII.

295.



NCE did I dream—for but one moment's space—
Of the beloved face :
God sends not such dreams twice ;
One unforeseen glad instant must suffice.

296.

One word is spoken in extremest need :
Well must the listener heed !
One moment flashes forth the heavenly light ;
Then silence, and the night.

297.

A thousand dreams of stars and flowers and sun—

Of her alas! but one:

With deepest awe, with measureless surprise,

I heard her voice and met her eyes.

298.

“*Do what is given you*”—this, I know, she said,

Standing beside my bed:

Once—only once—the dear voice spoke;

I marvelled, and I woke.

XCIV.

299.



OST desolate is this universe of ours!

The very stars must pass away

With all their human lives, with all their flowers:

To them their centuries seem but as a day.

300.

We mourn our ceaseless dead—
But there are countless stars whose light
Is quenched within the eternal night,
Whose last word has been said.

301.

Far more in number than the bright live orbs
Are these whose work is done :
Their ranks are ever swollen, as time absorbs
The light and heat of many an aging sun.

302.

In this vast pathless universe I groan ;
I have no hold on night, no grasp of day :
O mother, thou wast all my own !
When thou wast here, I never lost my way.

XCV.

303.



CHILD was gathering blossoms in a lane :
She turned now and again
To meet the mother's glance, the eyes that smiled
Their deep love on the child.

304.

Then all was well—one short sigh of relief—
No dread, no thought of grief.
Now back once more to search the grassy banks
And thin the cowslip-ranks !

305.

I watched :—I heard a sudden cry,
“*Mother !*” The sun was sinking in the sky ;
Dark clouds assailed him on his golden throne,
Evening approached : the child was now alone.

306.

The mother's form had passed beyond her sight :

I saw the blossoms just now held so tight
Dropped from the trembling fingers one by one.

. . . How is it, mother, with thy son?

307.

One thought is left, but one—to overtake,

Though foot may weary, heart may break :

Once more, ere falls the darkness, lowers the storm,

To see, to clasp, the mother's form.

XCVI.



308.

. . . HE child? Ah! she will see

Beyond that turning, past that gate or tree,

The mother—sobs will cease ;

For her wild grief will change to perfect peace.

309.

For her the sunset heavens will clear ;
The purple clouds that threatened came not near :
No star will veil its splendour ; night will be
Spread over windless hills and waveless sea.

310.

But I—ere I may stand
Holding, alive in mine, the far-off hand,
Ere I may overtake the far-off form,
Above my head must burst the boundless storm.

IV.

I.



1.

ET ought I to despair?

When one so pure and sweet has passed away,

Does her hand point to darkness or to day?

To gloom or sunlit air?

2.

Her life was tenderest love, from end to end.

Can such supreme love die—

Be mixed with stars or sky?

Is not the vanished still the present Friend?

3.

Mother, where art thou now ?

Not surely in the tomb !

Not there the loving eyes, the stainless brow,

Not there—but far beyond death's mists and gloom.

4.

Thou wouldst not have me weep ;

This much—amid the sorrow—this I know :

Thou sentest me the sleep

That gave me strength to bear the unmeasured woe.

5.

If I give way to pain

My pain, O mother-heart, may trouble thee.

What thou wouldst have me gain

Is strength—and selfless love, and purity.

6.

It may be that my eyes
That linger overlong upon thy tomb
Should now reseek the skies
Where deathless starlight battles still with gloom.

7.

It may be that thou say'st
With voice more sweet than morning's sweetest song,
"I tarry for thee, son—be brave, be strong;
So shall the hours make haste."

II.



8.

IS said of grief's wild dart
However near its dripping red point goes
That God goes nearer, and can interpose
Himself between the spear-point and the heart.

9.

If this be so, though we discern not how,
How close God stands to every being born,
If every thorn-point in each crown of thorn
Wounds God's, not only wounds each human brow !

III.



10.

DEEP is the human heart:
When anguish comes, how true friends rally round;
If human love had power, then death discrowned
And forceless would depart.

11.

But human love has power—to this extent,
That the mute frozen horror melts at last;
The pain no human strength can bear is past;
By whom were loving friends who saved me sent?

12.

By whom if not by thee,
Mother, whose care still active from above
Incarnate once is unincarnate love
And perfect ever-present sympathy.

13.

Old enmities give way
Buried in love's vast overwhelming wave,
And hearts estranged to-day
Grow one, though one in tears, beside thy grave.

IV.



14.

O large the army grows,
The unseen army of the well-loved dead !
We, here, for yet a little while make head
Against unnumbered foes.

15.

But broken is the square—now back to back
Or side by side we stand,
A small sore-smitten band ;
Blood freely runs and corpses strew the track.

16.

And yet amid wild blows
Somewhat of strange delight
Waxes and heightens, thrills the heart and glows :
So much of day is done, so near is night.

17.

So near is night, when on the hard-fought field
As the great moon from silent heaven peers down
The square that would not yield
Will rest—for every brow has won death's crown.

V.



18.

UT yet a greater host

Of silent mourners seems to encompass me :

They cross the wastes of many a shadowy sea

Swift-hovering, ghost on ghost.

19.

They cross the unknown years ;

They say, with grasp of hand or loving look,

“ From each of us death took

A mother ”—then their eyes grow dim with tears.

20.

Then through the darkness starlight slowly flows,

A strange sense thrills me as of love drawn nigh :

They say, “ Thou knowest not what it is to die ;


What warrior dreams of rest 'mid shouts and blows ?

21.

“From each of us death stole
Our dearest,—but to each did Love restore
That dearest spirit;” I wait to gather more;
Nay, silence—but less strife within the soul.

VI.

22.

“UST many nights and mornings flee away
Ere comes the all-golden day
When we shall meet?” I said,
And sought news of the dead.

23.


No answer reached me. Then again I cried,
“However wildly I grieve
If unto thee I leave
All times and seasons, is my prayer denied?”

24.

“Wilt thou, if thus I trust,
Promise while I thy sacred oath record
That we shall meet, though this our star be dust?”
“I promise:” said the Lord.

VII.

25.

 IS right the sun should shine, the blossoms blow,
Though, mother, thou art gone:
'Tis right the stream of life should still flow on;
And who am I to say thou dost not know?

26.

The spring that comes may bring
Not only joy to man, but joy to thee.
'Tis well that once again should smile the sea,
The birds once more with unchanged sweetness sing.

27.

When in the fields and lanes
Once more the cowslips and the kingcups blow,
Mother, I will not say thou dost not know,—
I will not say no sunlit spot remains.

28.

Renew thy wondrous tints, thou radiant rose,
And thou, white lily, don thy tenderest white !
My mother loves, my mother knows :
Wear lovelier robes, to gladden keener sight.

VIII.



29.

OWE a debt of thanks
To him who chose from out the angelic ranks
One having power to kill
With sweetest tenderness and perfect skill.

30.

So sad it might have been !
Some noble souls die hard,
Tortured and racked, pain-marred :
Some suffer terribly, and not for sin.

31.

But she, my mother, gently fell asleep.
No time to raise a hand ;
The attack was subtly planned ;
The eyes closed, ere the eyes had time to weep.

32.

The head not even dropped
Forward, but on the pillow calmly lay :
The heart that beat for me by night, by day,
Wavered—then softly stopped.

IX.



33.

ET other thanks I owe

To him the guardian Power who guides our way
That every sense was clear when closed the day ;
Clear almost as beneath the morning's glow.

34.

The eyes that in the far-off days looked down,
Ever with love, on flower and flower,
Growing in love, ne'er failed in power :
Death, having force to slay, could not discrown.

35.

Still were the stars discerned
As clearly as when in years long dead,
Mother, upon thy bridal night they burned :
No tiniest star could veil its golden head.

36.

And still was music sweet.
Thine ears that ever heard Love's pæan sung
Lost still few notes, however soft or fleet,
Of notes that charmed in days when thou wast young.

X.



37.

AND this is sweet to think—
That through long years thy firm faith never failed ;
Failed neither at death's dim brink,
Nor in those earlier days when doubt assailed.

38.

I, later born in this
The saddest century since the news went round
That death was sceptreless and Christ was crowned,—
I, seeking hope, full often sought amiss.

39.

Doubt smote, and smote me hard.
I, seeking God, full often found instead
Darkness, and thoughts ill-starred :
I sought Christ overlong amid the dead.

40.

But thou, whom love inspired,
Didst seek thy Saviour without doubts or fears :
Thou soon didst gain the goal that I desired
And still desire, with tears.

41.

While I was lingering at the ill-fated tomb
Where Jesus' corpse in desolation lay,
Thine eyes could pierce the gloom :
Heaven thou didst reach,—and by a nobler way.

42.

As Jesus first appeared
To Mary, so when thy pure aid I sought
I found sweet faith within thy being inwrought;
Thought's stormy dark heaven cleared.

43.

For God appeared to thee
Though not in waves or sun:
While I was seeking God within the sea
Or in the mountains, thou with God wast one.

44.

The poet seeks—and finds
Somewhat divine within the wild waves' roar,
Within the music of the warring winds,
Upon the storm-swept shore.

45.

But thou who carriedst God within thine heart
Hadst never need of Nature's kiss,
Though sweet to thee was this
And sweet the land of Art.

46.

Thou wast so near to God that every day
When God's clear sunshine rose
No dark doubts fled away :
Love questions not, but knows.

XI.

47.



AND now I hold thy letters in my hand :
As from another land
They come—they deepen holiest grief,
And yet bring some relief.

48.

They speak of meeting—simple words and wise—

Not overmuch is said :

Yet in each sacred phrase a volume lies

For she who wrote is dead.

49.

A few sweet thoughts and perfect words suffice,—

But the whole soul is there :

No fruitless sorrow, no prolonged advice,

Only a mother's heart laid bare.

50.

Enough it is. I thank thee for the gift

Sent from God's starriest sky

That bids me not despair, but ever lift

My thoughts from death to love that cannot die.

XII.

51.



ND so the tale of well-nigh fifty years

Closes, a tale divine :

And through the agony, the blinding tears,

I say, "Thank God that such a love was mine!"

52.

To know such love is something. Though God take

Now to another sphere

The spirit that loved, and though my whole heart break,

Still that great love *was* here.

53.

That love was here; and if beneath the sun

One thing has force at all,

If the far unseen heights by aught be won,

If at a touch death's barriers fall,

54.

That touch, that forceful power, is love like thine
That spake for forty years and more to me,
And now yet stronger, even more divine,
Speaks from eternity.

XIII.



55.

HEY say that "Jesus wept."
Sweet is the old record, sweet the loving thought—
God into contact with our sorrow brought;
Heaven's boundary over-stept.

56.

Dogmas? Save this point, none;
That through the heart of man in saddest hour
Flashed the conviction that some deathless Power
Crossed swords with death—and won.

XIV.



57.

HEY say that Jesus "rose."

Sweet is the old record, sweet the gracious thought—

God with our griefs and agonies inwrought ;

God conscious of our woes :

58.

God, lord of life and master of the sun,

Encountering starless night,—

Putting to desperate flight

The hosts that rule the darkness, one by one.

59.

Dogmas ? Nay, Love instead !

No thought abides save this,

That Love's eternal kiss

Hath fallen upon the forehead of the dead ;

60.

That at that kiss the dead
May pass into the land of light supreme,
Where joy is real and sorrow is the dream
And "Farewell" is not said.

61.

Mother, if Jesus rose,
Then thou in God's sweet strength hast risen as well;
When o'er thy brow the solemn darkness fell
It was but for one moment of repose.

62.

Thy love is mine—my deathless love to thee!
May God's love guard us till all death is o'er,—
Till thine eyes meet my sorrowing eyes once more,—
Then guard us still, through all eternity!

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